

RED CROSS APOLOGIZES FOR BAN ON RELIGIOUS SPEECH

On March 11, the Catholic League went on a tear against the American Red Cross. Four hours later we got what we wanted: a reversal of its newly minted policy banning religious speech at its functions and a much-deserved apology.

The pressure we put on the American Red Cross was enormous. We asked over 100 organizations to drop their support for the Red Cross because of the decision by the national headquarters to support one of its California chapters in prohibiting the singing of "God Bless America" and "America the Beautiful" at a Red Cross luncheon.

The problem began when the Red Cross Orange County Chapter in Santa Ana, California, banned students from Orange County High School of the Arts from singing the two patriotic songs at its March 10 event.

The American Red Cross issued a news release stating its support for censoring the students. It exclaimed its "sensitivity to religious diversity" by noting its "preference for a music program that would be inclusive and not offend different populations participating in this particular event." We branded this a gag rule.

William Donohue told the media that the reason he was calling for drastic action was the decision of the national headquarters to back the California chapter. He criticized the organization for adopting "the platform of political correctness by censoring the free speech of young men and women who want to honor God and country."

The campaign against the Red Cross had begun. We faxed our friends letters asking them "to send the

Red Cross an unmistakable message by refusing to donate one more dime to the organization.” Our request was sent to our allies in virtually every faith community. Donohue said, “The time to put an end to this anti-religious madness is now.”

It didn’t take long before the Red Cross got the message. It quickly issued an apology saying it had made a “mistake.” We accepted the apology but rejected the notion that a “mistake” had been made. Indeed we said it was “intellectually dishonest” not to admit that it was “a calculated decision to punish religious speech.”

We ended by wondering whether the organization would soon change its name. “Any group that has ‘Cross’ in its name is clearly being insensitive to religious diversity,” we concluded.